



The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

Many of the important things that are happening do not lend themselves to headlines or paragraph treatment. For example, throughout the year that is drawing to a close the work of the universal Church has been quietly maintained in every quarter of the world, sowing seeds that may ripen into a rich harvest when the war has become a memory of the distant past.

All over the world there have been increases in the circulation of the Bible. The American Bible Society reports a marked rise in sales in Japan in the first quarter of 1940 in comparison with the same period in 1939; the British and Foreign Bible Society a circulation in India for the year 1939 of 1,338,000—125,000 more than the previous year. The latter Society had large increases in Central and South-eastern Europe and a record circulation in South America. It has editions of the Scriptures in 745 different languages, and thirteen new languages were added in 1939.

THE CHURCH IN JAPAN

The Church in Japan, as in Germany, is faced with an aggressive and totalitarian nationalism. A Religious Organisations Law came into force in April, which requires all religious bodies to fit into the national structure. The Nippon Sei Kokwai, the Church founded by the Anglican missions, decided to ask for the resignation of the British and American bishops and the withdrawal of all foreign priests from positions of authority. Plans are being made for the amalgamation of all Christian denominations in a single body under some name like "The Genuine Christian Church of Japan," and a great gathering of Christians was held in October to inaugurate the new body. It is stated that the Russian Orthodox Church and all the Protestant bodies have agreed to enter the new combination. The decision of the Nippon Sei Kokwai is not yet known. Many missionaries, British, Canadian and American, have been compelled to leave Japan or are being withdrawn by their missionary societies. Dr. Kagawa, the distinguished Japanese evangelist and social worker was arrested in August, but released three weeks later. He is said to have retired to his native island with the intention of devoting the rest of his life to ministering to those suffering from tuberculosis.

In Manchuria a new shrine to the goddess Ametarasu-Omikami, "the divine imperial ancestress of Japan," was recently established in the grounds of the imperial palace. The ceremony took place in the presence of the prime minister and many Chinese and Japanese officials. Loyalty and piety towards the goddess are declared to be the ethical precepts of the empire. It is expected that compulsory attendance at this shrine will be required of all educational institutions, as is demanded at Shinto shrines in Japan, Korea and Formosa.

THE CHURCH IN SUMATRA

The Batak Church in Sumatra, founded by German missionaries and numbering half-a-million, has this year passed through a grave crisis. The German missionaries were interned in May and five hundred schools were transferred from the mission to the

control of the Government. The patriarchal methods of the German missionaries had done little to prepare the Church for the sudden change. It was also made more difficult by the fact that Church and school were inseparably united, the Batak teacher catechist being both leader of the congregation and in charge of the school. Three Dutch missionaries were called in to give their assistance and a special synod of the Batak Church was summoned. The Batak leaders declared themselves in favour of complete Church independence, and with the full consent of the Dutch missionaries a Batak pastor was appointed Chairman of the Church. The new system was inaugurated in August and a special offertory was made for the support of the new organisation.

THE CHURCHES ON THE CONTINENT

Information from France shows that the life of the Evangelical Churches is still vigorous in spite of recent events. The Paris Faculty of Protestant Theology has reopened this winter. A national synod held at Nîmes in August resolved that everything possible should be done to maintain the unity of the Church in the occupied and unoccupied areas and a common effort made to help the weaker parishes. Many regions in the south which formerly received help from the north are now trying to help the latter.

In Lithuania the land and property of the Churches have been expropriated. It is reported from Latvia that while many Christians have under pressure abandoned the Church, others have shown increased devotion. In Estonia religious instruction is no longer permitted in the schools and the theology faculty at Dorpat has been closed, but the Lutheran Church continues to manifest a vigorous life.

The Roman Catholic Church on the continent has experienced both gain and loss. In Spain the "laicity" laws of the Republic have been abolished, the ecclesiastical budget has been restored, instruction in the catechism has been made obligatory in primary schools and teaching by members of religious orders is permitted. In Poland, on the other hand, the loss and suffering have been terrible. Priests have been killed, tortured and sent to concentration camps, and religious orders have been suppressed. In the region under Soviet occupation conditions are much the same. Religious orders have been dissolved and religious teaching is forbidden, and Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant clergy have been put to death.

The foregoing information has been taken from the "Survey of the Year 1940" in the forthcoming January issue of the *International Review of Missions* (2 Eaton Gate, London, S.W.1. 10s. 6d. a year, single copies 3s.), of which Dr. Paton has kindly let me see the proofs. The Survey which has for many years been an annual feature of the Review, extends to 130 pages and contains a mass of interesting information about the Christian cause in all parts of the world.

COVENTRY

The following extracts are from a letter from a vicar in Coventry: "I do not suppose that the main features of the raid and its immediate effects differ from those in London and other cities. At the same time it is, I think, true that the scale of the disaster exceeded anything that anybody had imagined. It was without precedent. In particular I don't suppose that any other city has suffered the sense of complete isolation from the outside world which the breakdown of the communications and the blocking of roads produced for at least twenty-four hours. Nothing could have done more to cancel this than the King's visit to the city within thirty hours of the 'All clear.' The fact of the visit and the King's demeanour, grave but heartening, did more than anything else to wipe out the sense of forlornness.

"Looking back on the experience of those days there are many outstanding causes for thankfulness. Of these, I should put first the flowering of nobility in the midst of destruction. To witness the courage and kindness, the patience, wit and ingenuity of people who had lost everything and for whom the future was utterly dark, and to mark

the way in which men and women took or accepted responsibility for leadership and organisation in the relief centres, was an unforgettable experience. For at least twenty-four hours multitudes were without a home, either because their houses had been destroyed or because of the proximity of delayed action bombs; and it was out of this extreme of poverty, when for a few hours at least food was not easy to obtain outside the relief centres, when many of them had lost not only property but loved ones and many more were quite uncertain about the survival of members of their family, that these noble qualities flowered as brightly as their courage had been shown during the hours of the actual raid. There must be literally hundreds of men and women, youths and girls, who performed acts of unsung heroism and many of them are now showing equal fortitude in the wards of hospitals round the city.

"Secondly, there was the discovery of the reality of Christian fellowship. The clergy from one rural deanery from another diocese sent immediately £100 to relieve their brother clergy who had lost property. The arrival of voluntary helpers from congregations in other towns, the despatch of clothing, food and other things, and the messages of prayer and sympathy, and soon of admiration, assumed proportions of an invasion or a flood. And in the same way overnight one felt that all the usual barriers of suspicion and separation were down and neighbourliness was gloriously in the ascendant. I find it difficult to put words to the quality of fellowship that we experienced during and after the raid. It was something in my own experience quite new and had a radiant quality in wonderful contrast to the desolation of the city and many of its churches. Again, though I do not know about this from inside, there must have been a fine achievement of sympathy and adaptation between the city authorities and the police on the one hand and on the other the troops, officials and voluntary helpers who came in to supplement, if not take over, the usual public services in reconstructing the city's life. If the King, in his Field Marshal's uniform, was the most signal message of the country's sympathy, the next most eloquent was the 'Tommy,' grey with dust and mud, digging to release entombed people, marshalling the traffic on point duty and whistling at the work of demolition."

THE CHRISTIAN TEMPER

I give some extracts from a letter from one of our members whom I first got to know during the last war and whose qualities of heart, mind and judgment I have long learned to value:

"I have been reading Jeremiah and feeling the extraordinary appositeness of his message to the present times. I feel that now, as then, the predominant attitude of mind ought to be that we are all under the judgment of God—that we all have a very hard lesson to learn and much suffering to traverse. It is to me quite impossible to look at the world now and see this war as a plain conflict between good and evil. I do believe that Hitler represents a quite hideously evil attitude to man and the world, and that we do right in resisting him and that we do stand in a muddled way for something far nobler and at bottom really Christian. But we cannot—we certainly do not—separate ourselves from the un-Christian civilisation which has spread all over the world and is culminating in the use of all the ingenuity of applied science, all the daring, courage and initiative of young men, in destroying indiscriminately men, women, children, slums, churches, factories, forests, works of art, food, wealth, beauty, in one country, one continent after another. It is futile to conceal from ourselves that aerial warfare is bound to be largely indiscriminate and that, in a hideous way, it matches with our mass civilisation in its disregard for individual persons.

"Is not the Christian's duty to wait upon God, to submit to God's judgment, not passively, but watching intently to see what the lesson is that God is teaching, what can be learnt in many spheres, political as well as spiritual, about the nature of man, his sins, his godlikeness, his need for conversion, the signs of how that conversion may be hastened; and further, what can be learnt about God and His purpose for the world and how we

may bend ourselves to that? We have all talked so much in the past, and made so many schemes, and it has all come to this. Isn't our first duty as Christians not so much to protest that we are right and that surely God must be on our side, as to learn humility and repentance, to long not only that the German people but that we ourselves and the whole world should be converted and healed; to welcome as eagerly signs of God's working in Pétain's France as in America, to cling to the belief in one Catholic and Apostolic Church and to pray that out of the experience of its members in Germany and England, in China and Japan, in Denmark, Norway, Finland, France, in Russia and the New World, a new message may come from God?

"As to our action, I think the King expressed quite simply what we have to do. He said, I think, 'we can but do what we believe to be right, and commit our cause reverently to God.' Our belief is not infallible; our cause may in God's hands find a culmination undreamt of by us."

BOOKS

Two new volumes have just been published in the C.N.-L. Books Series (Sheldon Press. 1s. 6d. each), each dealing with one of the many immense tasks which must be taken in hand if there is to be a new order of society. The first volume, *Christian Discrimination* by Brother George Every, is a plea for the cultivation of good taste and for a critical examination in the light of the Christian faith of the beliefs and attitudes implicit in modern literature and architecture. It directs attention to one of the predicaments in which men find themselves to-day, and suggests that the encouragement of discrimination may in present circumstances be the most practical and effective form of social and political action.

The second volume, *The Universities in Transformation*, is by Professor Adolf Löwe, who to our great loss has found in the United States an opportunity for the exercise of his gifts with which this country lacked the imagination to provide him. In Dr. Löwe's view the English universities achieved during the later part of the nineteenth century a unique educational success. The crisis in which they are now involved arises from their failure to adapt themselves to radical changes in their social environment. The nature of these changes, the problems to which they give rise and the remedies for which they call, are set forth with great penetration and insight. This small volume, packed with wisdom, would make an admirable Christmas present for a friend on the staff of a university.

Lord Cecil of Chelwood's admirable broadcast talk on the subject of aliens has been reissued by the Christian Council for Refugees (Bloomsbury House, Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.1) under the title *Refugees and the Christian Conscience* (1d., 100 copies 5s.).

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

P.S. Christmas Gift subscriptions are rolling in. Thank you!

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